



**Introduction to the Epistle of James:
The Work of Faith**

A Cultural Problem with a Practical Solution

- **Problem:** many people are simply not interested in Christianity—or even reject it outright—because of how Christians live and behave.
- **Solution:** live your faith in how you act. Make yours a faith that is “alive” rather than “dead.” Some people will notice your virtuous conduct and this may open the opportunity to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with them.
- **“Do the Word”:** When your actions reflect your faith and words.

“Faith without works is dead”

James 2:17

- **New International Version:** In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead
- **English Standard Version:** So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.
- **New Living Translation:** So you see, faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.

Reconciling Faith with Works

- How to explain “Faith without works is dead”?
- James asks a different question than Paul: “How to live righteously?” rather than “How to be saved?” In other words, “Once we are saved, how should we live?”

Rhetorical Site: Author

- Author: Most likely Jacob (“James”), the half-brother of Jesus
- Failed to believe in Jesus’ ministry while he was on Earth (Mark 3:21)
- Saw the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:7) and was among those who were awaiting the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14)
- A devoted Jewish-Christian after Christ’s resurrection
- Becomes the leader of the Church in Jerusalem
- James was martyred in 62 A.D., stoned by scribes and Pharisees for not renouncing Jesus

Rhetorical Site

- Its “**ethos**” results from who wrote it (Jesus’ half-brother) and its use of sayings by Jesus (especially the Sermon on the Mount)
- Date: written some time between 40s and 62 A.D.
- Audience: Primarily Jewish-Christians living outside of Palestine
- Purpose: present practical applications of the Christian faith
- Genre: a collection of short moral essays and aphorisms

Sources for the Epistle of James

- The book of Proverbs in the Old Testament
- The sermons of Jesus, especially the Sermon on the Mount

General Characteristics

- *A focus on practical applications of faith rather than theological doctrines*
- “No profound theologian, James’ genius lies in his profound moral earnestness; in his powerfully simple call for repentance, for action, for a consistent Christian lifestyle” (Douglas Moo, *The Letter of James: An Introduction and Commentary*).
- **A General Epistle** written to the Church at large rather than to one specific congregation

Specific Characteristics

- **Aphorisms:** a pithy observation that contains a general truth, such as, “if it ain't broke, don't fix it” —a New Testament book of Proverbs
- A “**diatribe**”: (see next slide)
- **Metaphors:** taken from nature and everyday life
- **Allusions:** references famous people from the past
- **Contrasts:** uses heightened comparisons to emphasize points

Definition: “Diatribes”

- “A form of ancient rhetoric [i.e. the study of how to influence an audience] . . . in which a teacher tried to persuade students of the truth of a given philosophy through **imagined dialogue**, usually in the form of questions and answers. Very often an imagined debate in which a partner (interlocutor) would raise objections or false conclusions, which, after a vigorous “By no means!” the teacher would take pains to correct.”

--How to Read the Bible Book by Book
by Gordon F. Fee and Douglas Stuart

Themes (General Concepts)

- Endurance in hardship
- Responsible Christian Living
- Practice what you preach
- Living together in harmony

Emphasis (Specific Topics)

- Practical faith on the part of believers
- Joy and patience in the midst of trials
- The nature of true (Christian) wisdom
- Attitudes of the rich toward the poor
- Abuse and proper use of the tongue

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The Local Church: Where the Christian Faith is Lived Out

- “One of the outstanding ways in which the difference shows between Christians and the surrounding world is in the quality of fellowship which should mark the local church. The church is God’s family . . . Let it be a fellowship of rich and poor (1:9-11), who alike consider their faith their greatest wealth (2:5); a fellowship of care where brother or sister never goes away in need (2:15), where the tongue is guarded lest it disrupt (4:11-12; 5:9) and where heavenly wisdom in all its peace (3:17) produces that soil of true oneness in which righteousness can come to harvest (3:18).”

--John Stott, *The Message of James: The Tests of Faith* (p.15)

The Bible Project Video

- Video overview on the Epistle of James
- Length 8:03 minutes
- <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/james/>

Questions for Reflection

- How does your reading and studying of the Epistle of James contribute to your understanding of Christian doctrines?
- How does your reading and studying of the Epistle of James help you live out your Christian faith in your everyday life?

Let Us Pray

